



City of Somerville

PLANNING BOARD

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

TO: Planning Board
FROM: Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff
RE: 600 Windsor Place (P&Z 21-059)
POSTED: February 10, 2022

RECOMMENDATION: Approve with Conditions (MPSP)

Staff memos are used to communicate background information, analysis, responses to public comments, review of statutory requirements and other information from the Planning, Preservation & Zoning staff to the Review Board members.

This memo summarizes the development review application submitted for 600 Windsor Place identifies any additional discretionary or administrative development review that is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance, and provides related analysis or feedback as necessary. The application was deemed complete on December 6, 2021 and is scheduled for a public hearing on February 17, 2022. Any Staff recommended findings, conditions, and decisions in this memo are based on the information available to date prior to any public comment at the scheduled public hearing.

LEGAL NOTICE

US RELP 600 Windsor Owner LLC proposes a Master Plan in the Boynton Yards sub area of the Master Planned Development overlay district, which requires a Master Plan Special Permit.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSAL

US RELP 600 Windsor Owner LLC is proposing a master plan for a 1.36-acre development site roughly bounded by the MBTA's Fitchburg rail right-of-way to the north, Windsor Place to the south, 54 Webster Avenue to the west and an existing surface parking lot to the east. The proposal includes the following:

- One (1) LEED Platinum lab building
- One (1) Civic Space
- One (1) Thoroughfare
- 380,000 SF of commercial uses, 38,000 SF of which will be dedicated to Arts and Creative Enterprise uses (ACE)
- 19,000 SF allocated for a community center space

Master Plan Build Out Summary

Project	Phase	Specific Type	Floor Plate	Stories	GFA	Site/Lot Area
Building	1	Lab Building	33,000 SF	12	380,000 SF	43,930 SF
Civic Space	1	Central Plaza				10,991 SF
Thoroughfare	1	Alley				4,136 SF

ADDITIONAL REVIEW NECESSARY

600 Windsor Place is located in the Boynton Yards Subarea of the Master Planned Development overlay district (BY MPD) and the Boynton Yards neighborhood represented by Ward 2 Councilor J.T. Scott. The proposed Master Plan requires a Master Plan Special Permit (MPSP). If the MPSP is approved, entitlement of each individual thoroughfare, civic space, and building identified in the Master Plan will occur through subsequent development review by the Planning Board.

NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

A neighborhood meeting was hosted by Ward Councilor J.T. Scott and the development team on August 5, 2021 via the GoToWebinar virtual meeting platform.

ANALYSIS

For proposed master plans, Staff analyzes the proposal based on the requirements of the sub-area where the property is located, consistency with SomerVision, neighborhood plans, and urban design frameworks, as well as planning and urban design principles to achieve the City's objectives.

Proposed master plans utilizing the BY MPD must:

- Meet the required thoroughfare network for any land within their development site boundary.
- Provide a space for a community center principle use that is either 5% of the total commercial floor area proposed or 20,000 SF, whichever is less.
- Provide for 20% civic space of the development site (minus thoroughfare).
 - Provide portions of any required civic space within the development site boundary.
- Provide at least 75% of floor space as non-residential uses (excluding Auto-Oriented uses).
- Provide at least 10% of floor area as Arts and Creative Enterprises principal use.
- Provide a minimum ratio of commercial feet to dwelling units at 375:1.
- Provide less than the maximum of 1,500 off-street parking spaces allowed for the district.
- Provide less than the maximum of 300 reserved parking spaces allowed for the district.

The master plan meets the requirements detailed above. The Master Plan is composed of three components, one (1) proposed lab building that will be LEED Platinum certifiable, one (1) Central Plaza Civic Space, and (1) one Alley type Thoroughfare. The Applicant proposes the Master Plan phasing to include all three components to be constructed during one (1) phase, with construction anticipated to take 24 months.

Proposed Thoroughfare

The proposed Thoroughfare is the only required thoroughfare for this development site. The Thoroughfare will be consistent with the Alley Thoroughfare typology of the Zoning Ordinance (SZO). The Alley will be located along the eastern edge of the development site and will create a four (4) way intersection with Windsor Place, future Thoroughfare 1 (also known as Archibald Query Way/AQW), and Windsor Street. The intent of the intersection as proposed is to prioritize pedestrian and bicycle safety in conjunction with aligned vehicular movement to the lab building. The Alley will primarily provide vehicular access to the Master Plan's proposed lab building for both parking and services. The single-entry point will enable the removal of one of the site's existing curb cuts along Windsor Place. The final design of the proposed Alley will occur during the future Site Plan Approval process.

Proposed Building

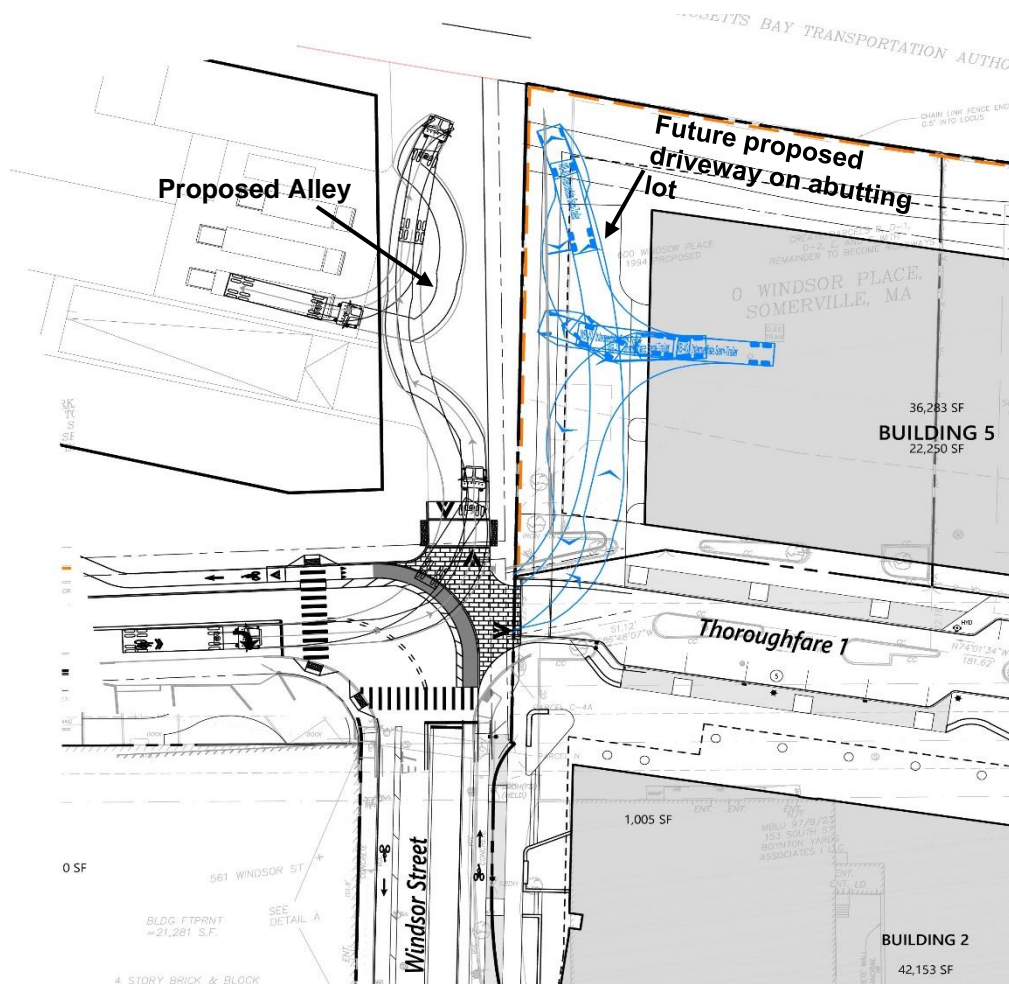
The proposed Master Plan includes one (1) building, a 12-story lab building consisting of 380,000 SF of commercial uses. The lab building will achieve LEED Platinum certifiable status and is intended to have several sustainability elements incorporated into the design. The design of the building will be dealt with during the future Site Plan Approval process. Approximately 323,000 SF will be dedicated to lab/office/retail related uses, and 38,000 SF will be set aside to support ACE related uses to further support the local creative economy. 19,000 SF will be reserved for a community center space. This Master Plan is proposing no residential dwelling units as part of the master plan development.

Proposed Civic Space

As part of the MPD zoning requirements, at least 20% of the Master Plan development site needs to be designated as a Civic Space. The proposed Master Plan is designating approximately 11,000 SF of the site area as a Central Plaza Civic Space type, which is generally a rectilinear civic space meant for passive recreation, civic purposes, commercial activities, and defined by a hardscape. The frontage of the Central Plaza will be along Windsor Place and will increase the separation of the building from the Windsor PI right-of-way. The Master Plan proposes to locate the Central Plaza at the front of the lot. This will serve as a Civic Space between future Thoroughfare 1/AQW, Windsor Place, and the future proposed D3 Civic Spaces along Windsor Street. The location will support this new pedestrian spine into the Boynton Yards neighborhood. The Central Plaza will include a real-time transit information screen, contain a mix of landscape and hardscape to provide opportunities for flexible programming and complimentary uses for the Boynton Yards neighborhood. The Central Plaza design will be further developed during the future Site Plan Approval process.

Transportation and Access

After analysis of the submitted plans, Mobility Staff identified potential challenges to designing the 4-way intersection where the proposed Alley will intersect with the Boynton Yards Street network (see graphic below). Development of the properties abutting the proposed Alley to the east could exacerbate the design challenge. To mitigate this transportation impact, Staff recommends a condition that the Applicant provide vehicular access and easement rights to the abutting properties that the Alley services. This would allow all abutting properties to have vehicular access from one alley and a more regular intersection design. Additionally, Staff recommends a condition permitting the change of the proposed Alley Thoroughfare type to a Local Street Thoroughfare type without the need for a Major Amendment to the Master Plan. This will permit abutting properties to collaborate to produce a potentially wider Thoroughfare type that straddles the eastern property line and uses land from all abutting sites, which is not available to the 600 Windsor site without detrimental impact to the feasibility of the proposed lab building and civic space. This proposed condition would allow that decision to be made at Site Plan Approval. Together, these conditions can result in better vehicular access into all properties and avoid an undesirable double alley or double driveway situation complicating the 4-way intersection.



The submitted documentation relating to transportation impacts (MMP, TIS, & TAP) identifies new impacts to the neighborhood which require mitigation. Mobility Staff have recommended several conditions aimed at mitigating those transportation impacts. This mitigation will be accomplished through improvements to the pedestrian, bicycle, and/or transit facilities infrastructure within or in close proximity to the development site.

Site Design and Layout

The Union Square Neighborhood Plan (USNP) states that all development in Boynton Yards should honor the Prospect Hill landmark by maintaining some view corridors up to the monument. The USNP also states that development should contribute towards creating an iconic skyline to be viewed from the hill. The proposed building could hinder views from Prospect Hill and limit viewpoints from the proposed Civic Space to Prospect Hill. Orientation of the buildings should be considered during the Site Plan approval process and staff have recommended a condition that perspective views oriented from vantage points at the Prospect Hill Monument looking toward Boynton Yards must be submitted during the Site Plan Approval process.

As identified in the USNP, Boynton Yards is separated from Union Square by the Fitchburg right-of-way (ROW). Having another connection will increase connectivity between Boynton yards and Union Square. The USNP states that it would be beneficial to create another connection between Union Square and Boynton Yards, such as a pedestrian bridge over the rail tracks to connect the two areas. A new pedestrian bridge would widely benefit the neighborhood and commuters, as it would create better access from the future Union Square GLX Station to the future developments in Boynton Yards. Though the exact location where a future pedestrian bridge could land in Boynton yards has not been determined, Staff have recommended a condition that the proposed Thoroughfare not preclude the development of a future pedestrian bridge over the ROW from the Union Square GLX station.

The USNP and the community have called for a community path extension along the ROW. The Applicant has expressed interest in potentially providing such a path. The Applicant's application states that in response to community interests, their submitted master plan proposal will not preclude the development of a community path extension along the north of the property. However, the Applicant has not provided graphics or plans depicting such a path in their application. Staff anticipates that future site plan approval for the building and Alley would address the community path extension upon determination of its feasibility.

Parking

The proposed master plan includes 200 below-grade vehicular parking spaces that will support the proposed lab building's commercial uses. The parking spaces will count towards the 1500 parking space cap for the BY MPD. As part of the Mobility Management Plan (MMP), the number of off-street parking spaces in the MPSP may

not exceed 200 total parking spaces and are be calculated as the overall parking ratio of 0.6 parking spaces per 1000 SF. The applicant proposes 131 bike parking spaces for the proposed building's commercial uses. 103 will be secured, long-term bike storage, while the remaining 28 will be short-term bike spaces.

As part of the approved MMP, the building must allocate 15% of the vehicular parking spots as Electric Vehicle (EV) spaces with level 2 chargers upon occupancy. The remaining 85% of the parking spaces must be EV ready. Staff would like to see at least 25% of the parking spaces provided to be equipped with level 2 EV chargers to help meet the City's goal to be net-zero by 2050.

Community Input

Various neighborhood concerns were raised by community members at the neighborhood meeting. Concerns and comments include but are not limited to the following:

- Anticipated impact on traffic on the Webster Ave and Prospect St intersection.
- Amount of vehicular parking proposed is too much.
- General want for better access to site from the Union Square GLX station.
- Ensure development will not preclude the creation of a pedestrian bridge from Union Square to Boynton Yards and a future community path extension along the north of the property.
- Site should prioritize green infrastructure and stormwater management improvements.
- Bike lanes along Windsor PI should be separated from motor vehicles.
- The proposed lab building should prioritize jobs that meet the needs of all and across a range of professional disciplines.
- New construction impacts to the neighborhood and surrounding areas.
- Proposed building should be designed at the human scale.

Many of the concerns raised by community members will be addressed during the future Site Plan Approval process for the lab building, Central Plaza, and Alley. However, in response to the feedback provided by community members at the neighborhood meeting, the following has already been incorporated or identified in the proposed Master Plan:

- The applicant has reduced parking from originally proposed 350 spaces to 200 vehicular parking spaces (40% reduction).
- The submitted Master Plan will allow for the extension of the community path along the north property line.
- The applicant will work with relevant City Departments on a variety of design work for the installation of utility infrastructure.
- During the Site Plan Approval process, the applicant will work with the Mobility division on the proposed bike lanes along Windsor PI to ensure they are safely designed.

CONSIDERATIONS & FINDINGS

The Planning Board is required by the Somerville Zoning Ordinance to deliberate each of the following considerations at the public hearing. The Board must discuss and draw conclusions for each consideration detailed below but may make additional findings beyond this minimum statutory requirement.

Master Plan Special Permit Approval Considerations

1. The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.
2. The intent of the zoning district where the property is located.
3. The proposed alignment and connectivity of the Thoroughfare network.
4. The Gross Floor Area allocated to different use categories.
5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any adverse impacts on utility infrastructure.
6. Proposed development phasing.
7. Proposed on-street parking to address demand by customers of Retail Sales, Food & Beverage, or Commercial Services principal uses.

Information relative to the above considerations is provided below:

1. *The comprehensive plan and existing policy plans and standards established by the City.*

Staff believe that the proposal will help to achieve the following from SomerVision 2040 which is, the comprehensive Master Plan of the City of Somerville:

- Invest in the growth of a resilient economic base that is centered around transit, generates a wide variety of job opportunities, creates an active daytime population, supports independent local businesses, and secures fiscal self-sufficiency.
- Promote a dynamic urban streetscape that embraces public transportation, reduces car dependence, [] and safe for all pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Minimize the overall land use in Somerville dedicated to personal vehicles while encouraging alternative modes.
- Ensure Somerville civic spaces are for the entire community. They should be welcoming and easily accessible, and people should feel empowered to enjoy them and improve them.

2. *The intent of the zoning district where the property is located*

Staff believes that the proposed Master Plan meets the key objectives of SomerVision for transformation redevelopment in the Boynton Yards sub-area district; contributes towards the evolution of Union Square into an Urban Employment Center; and supports the street network, civic spaces, and commercial building objectives of the Boynton Yards Urban Design Framework.

Staff believes that the proposed Master Plan is consistent with the Boynton Yards Urban Design Framework which, is in, part, to permit denser development than would otherwise be permitted in the Mid-Rise and High-Rise districts; To require a minimum percentage of developed floor space to be set aside of occupancy by non-residential principal uses; and to constrain the supply of motor vehicle parking spaces to encourage the use of public transit, bicycles, and walking in lieu of driving.

3. The proposed alignment and connectivity of the Thoroughfare network.

Staff believes that the Master Plan's proposed new Thoroughfare aligns with what is planned in the Union Square Neighborhood Plan and required by the Boynton Yards sub-area of the MPD overlay district and the Boynton Yards UDF. The proposed Thoroughfare is located along the eastern edge of the site will create a four (4) way intersection with Windsor PI, future Thoroughfare/AQW, and Windsor St.

The Transportation Impact Assessment shows 2,046 new vehicular trips associated with this development. Most of the trips generated by the site are expected to be predominantly work-based trips.

4. The Gross Floor Area allocated to different use categories.

The proposed Master Plan allocates gross floor area to different uses of at least 75% to non-residential uses, 10% reserved for ACE space, and 5% reserved for a community center. Thirty-eight thousand (38,000) square feet will be provided as arts and creative space (ACE), which complies with Section 8.4.12.e.ii.a. The plan also includes nineteen thousand (19,000) square feet provided for a community center required which complies with Section 8.4.2.e.ii.b.

5. Mitigation proposed to alleviate any adverse impacts on utility infrastructure.

Staff believes that the infrastructure improvements included in the proposed Master Plan do not create any adverse impacts on existing utilities and that proposed improvements are in accordance with all City standards.

6. Proposed development phasing.

Staff believes the applicant's proposed one phase for the Master Plan is logical for the proposed development.

7. Proposed on-street parking to address demand by customers of Retail Sales, Food & Beverage, or Commercial Services principal uses.

Staff believes that the project will include sufficient on-street parking spaces to support business demand.

PERMIT CONDITIONS

Should the Board approve the Master Plan Special Permit, Planning, Preservation & Zoning Staff recommends the following conditions:

Permit Validity

- This Decision must be recorded with the Middlesex South Registry of Deeds.
- This MPSP certifies that development may proceed in accordance with the standards of the Boynton Yards sub area of the MPD overlay district and the superseding zoning districts specified on Map 8.3.12 (a) of the Somerville Zoning Ordinance.
- Applying for development review for any proposed thoroughfare, civic space, or building type identified in the submitted Master Plan constitutes substantial use of this MPSP for the purpose of subsequent development entitlement.
- All approvals are for property located outside the public right-of-way, which is at the discretion of the City.

Plan Revisions

- Changes to the number or general configuration of lots; the proposed types of thoroughfares, civic spaces, or building types; and the percentage of commercial floor area, arts and creative enterprise space, and the community center provided is a major amendment to the previously approved Master Plan and is permitted only as a revision to this MPSP.

Legal Agreements

- Development must comply with the Development Covenant by and between the City of Somerville and US RELP 600 Windsor Owner, LLC dated Month XX, 2022, as amended.
- The property owner and applicable future tenants shall comply with the Mobility Management Plan (MMP) submitted November 12, 2021, as approved and conditioned by the Director of Mobility.

Public Record

- Physical copies of all development review submittal materials, as permitted by the Planning Board, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division for the public record.
- One (1) physical copy of the Master Plan application materials and one (1) digital and (1) physical copy of all required application materials reflecting any plan changes required by the Board, if applicable, must be submitted to the Planning, Preservation, & Zoning Division for the public record prior to any additional permitting.

Thoroughfare

- The general alignment, connectivity, right-of-way width, and geometry of the thoroughfare must be substantially equivalent to the to the thoroughfares shown in the approved Master Plan.

- Thoroughfare lot must be dedicated to the public by a covenant or other deed restriction prior to the issuance of the required Thoroughfare Permit authorizing construction.
- The design of the Thoroughfare must not preclude the inclusion of a pedestrian bridge over the MTBA Fitchburg/Green Line rail right-of-way.
- The design of the proposed new thoroughfare and improvements to existing thoroughfares must include measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters to every extent practicable.
- Vehicular access and easement rights must be provided to any property abutting the proposed Alley.
- Changes to the proposed Alley Thoroughfare type to a Local Street thoroughfare type is not a Major Amendment to the approved Master Plan and may be permitted as de-minimis.

Land Platting

- Land Platting must result in a number and general configuration of lots and rights-of-way that is substantially equivalent to Preliminary Platting Plan dated July 25, 2021 of the submitted Master Plan.

Civic Space

- Civic space lot must be dedicated to the public by a covenant or other deed restriction prior to the issuance of the required Civic Space Permit authorizing construction.

Building

- Nineteen thousand (19,000) gross square feet of commercial floor space must be reserved for a community center principal use(s) in the Building with direct egress to the Civic Space. The community center space must be identified on floor plans submitted for Site Plan Approval.
- A total of thirty eight thousand (38,000) gross square feet of commercial floor space must be reserved for uses from the arts and creative enterprise (ACE) principal use categories by the completion of development (final building Certificate of Occupancy).
- The estimated floor space intended for ACE uses and summary data addressing satisfaction of this condition must be identified on floor plans submitted for the Site Plan Approval of the building.
- The actual floor space provided for ACE uses and summary data addressing satisfaction of this condition must be identified on floor plans submitted to the Inspectional Services Department.

Parking

- A total of two hundred (200) parking spaces are permitted for the development site.

Performance Obligation

- US RELP 600 Windsor Owner LLC must post a performance bond for 125% of the estimated costs to design and construct the proposed civic space Lot and all infrastructure and transportation mitigation identified above prior to applying for any building permit, thoroughfare permit, or civic space permit for development subject to this MPSP decision.

Development Permitting

- Materials submitted for the development review of the building must include perspective views oriented from vantage points at the Prospect Hill Monument looking toward Boynton Yards and beyond for consideration by the Planning Board.
- A written narrative or descriptive checklist identifying the completion or compliance with these conditions must be submitted with each Site Plan Approval application.

Transportation Mitigation

- To mitigate transportation impacts, the northern side of Windsor Place must be improved with, at minimum, a curb separated westbound protected bikeway. Design must not preclude an eastbound curb separated or quick build bikeway on the southern side of Windsor Place. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, the intersection of Windsor St and Windsor PI must be improved with, at least, interconnected curb separated bicycle facilities, pedestrian safety and infrastructure improvements, and a specialized gateway treatment for Thoroughfare 1. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.
- To mitigate transportation impacts, Windsor PI/Columbia St from the intersection of Windsor PI and Windsor St extending westward to the intersection of Columbia St and Webster Ave must be improved in a manner that establishes a new roadway centerline alignment, permits the interconnection of other planned and permitted bicycle improvements for the subject roadway, and includes a curb separated protected bikeway along the Windsor PI frontage. Final design must be approved by relevant City departments.